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BAJRANG TO RETURN PADMA SHRI, WRITES TO PRIME MINISTER

A day after Sakshi Malik quit sport as a protest, another Olympic medalist joined her. Bajrang decided to return his Padma Shri award on Friday

DELHI COPS STOP WRESTLER ON KARTAVYA PATH

Bajrang, the Tokyo Olympic and multiple Worlds medalist, wanted to meet the Prime Minister in Parliament and hand over his letter, which later was posted on X. Delhi Police, however, stopped him on Kartavya Path. Bajrang was conferred with the Padma Shri, the fourth highest civilian honour in the country, in 2019



BJP BHUSHAN AIDE AS PREZ A BIG ISSUE

I am returning my Padma Shri award to the Prime Minister, Bajrang wrote on X. He also posted a letter addressed to the PM | P19
Kadyan hurt by Punita's decision: The newly-elected senior vice-president Devender Kadyan said he was unaware of Bajrang's decision, adding he is hurt that he did not inform him in advance



Two

OF THE 15 OFFICE BEARERS WERE BACKED BY PROTESTING WRESTLERS



Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge with party leaders Rahul Gandhi, K C Venugopal and Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, CPI(M)'s Sitaram Yechury, NCP's Sharad Pawar, DMK's Tiruchi Siva and CPI's D Raja during a protest of the I.N.D.I.A bloc at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on Friday | PANDURANG NUN

I.N.D.I.A BLOC LEADERS HIT THE STREETS TO 'SAVE DEMOCRACY'

Rahul links Parl breach to lack of jobs, says BJP MPs ran from House

PREETHA NAIR @ New Delhi

IN their first joint protest outside Parliament, several senior leaders of the INDIA bloc launched a broadside against the BJP government for the recent suspension of 146 Opposition MPs from both Houses, accusing it of strangulating parliamentary democracy.

The leaders who attended the protest at Jantar Mantar, under the 'Save Democracy' banner included Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, Rahul Gandhi, NCP chief Sharad Pawar, CPM's Sitaram Yechury, CPI leader D Raja, RJD's Manoj Jha, and DMK's Tiruchi Siva. Parallely, the INDIA bloc partners held protests in several state capitals, including Lucknow, Thiruvananthapuram and Patna.

The call for a protest against the suspensions was made at the fourth meeting of the INDIA bloc early this week. As many as 100 MPs from Lok Sabha and 46 from Rajya Sabha were suspended during the

winter session of Parliament for demanding a statement from Union home minister Amit Shah on the security breach on December 13.

Speaking at the meeting, Rahul alleged that during the Parliament security breach, those who call themselves patriots ran away when smoke emanated from the canisters. "The issue is how did they enter Parliament. How could they bring gas canisters inside Parliament? They could have brought in something else," he said.

Rahul linked the incident to the spiraling unemployment rate in the country. "There is tremendous unemployment. That is why the youngsters jumped inside Parliament House," he said adding that by

MAHA SEAT TALKS

After the joint opposition protest at Jantar Mantar, Rahul drove with Sharad Pawar to the latter's residence. They are learnt to have had initial talks on seat sharing within Maha Vikas Aghadi

shunting out 150 MPs, the government has shut the voice of 60% of the people of India."

"These 150 MPs are not just people but the voice of the people of India as every MP comes to Parliament with the votes of lakhs of people," Rahul said.

Kharge said the INDIA bloc has come together as democracy is under threat. "When everyone unites, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will not be able to do anything. The more you try to crush us, the more we will rise. We are fighting unitedly to save the country and democracy," he said.

Pawar said the bloc is ready to pay whatever price is necessary to save democracy. "Today, farmers are going on the path of suicide; youngsters working in factories are not even getting proper wages. We will have to take responsibility and work hard to remove the forces attacking democracy," he said.

Tiruchi Siva accused the BJP government of attempting to destabilise the country's federal and secular structures.

Macron to be chief guest on Republic Day

YESHI SELI @ New Delhi

FRENCH President Emmanuel Macron will be the chief guest at India's 75th Republic Day parade on January 26.

"Thank you for your invitation, my dear friend @Narendra Modi. India, on your Republic Day, I'll be here to celebrate with you," Macron wrote on X, confirming his acceptance of India's invite.

India had initially invited US President Joe Biden to grace the occasion, but the US informed he won't be able to travel to India in January.

The invitation to Macron comes as India and France are celebrating the 25th anniversary of their strategic partnership.

"As strategic partners, India and France share a high degree of convergence on a range of regional and global issues. This year we are celebrating the 25th anniversary of the India-France Strategic Partnership, the Ministry of External Affairs said.

Earlier, on July 14, Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended France's Bastille Day Parade as the Guest of Honour. Macron will be the sixth French leader to attend Republic Day celebrations as chief guest. Jacques Chirac was the first in 1976. Valéry Giscard, Jacques Chirac, Nicolas Sarkozy and Francois Hollande are the other French leaders who have flown to India to be the R-Day chief guest.

France grounds aircraft with 303 Indians on board

YESHI SELI @ New Delhi

IN an eerie coincidence, on the day Shah Rukh Khan's latest film *Dunki* — which deals with human trafficking — released in theatres the world over, French authorities grounded a plane carrying 303 Indians over suspected human trafficking.

The Nicaragua-bound aircraft, operated by Romanian charter company Legend Airlines, had taken off from Dubai and landed in Vatra airport for a technical stopover when police intervened following an anonymous tipoff. Vatra is 210 km away from Paris by road.

France's national anti-organised crime unit JUNALCO has taken over the investigation, according to media reports.

"It is possible these people were hoping to cross over to the US or Canada illegally after landing in Managua (capital of

Nicaragua)... Indians risk their lives to reach the Americas illegally for a better future," said a source. The Indian mission in Paris said it is in touch with the local authorities. "French authorities informed us of a plane with 303 people, mostly Indian origin, from Dubai to Nicaragua detained on a technical halt at a French airport. Embassy team has reached & obtained consular access. We are investigating the situation, also ensuring wellbeing of passengers," it said.

There has been a dramatic rise in the number of Indians trying to enter the US illegally. Minister of State for External Affairs V Muraleedharan recently told Parliament that US officials had found 96,917 illegal Indian migrants in 2023. The Pew Research Centre pegs the number illegal Indians in the US at 7.25,000.

CM: Directed officials to lift hijab ban

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Mysuru

CHIEF Minister Siddaramaiah on Friday said that he has already directed the officials to lift the ban on wearing hijab in educational institutions.

Siddaramaiah's this statement brings to fore the hijab issue at a time when political parties are gearing up for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

Speaking after inaugurating a police station at Kavalande near Nanjangud in Mysuru district, Siddaramaiah said that after his Congress party assumed power in the State, he issued the directive to withdraw the ban on hijab.

When the CM was speaking about the Yuva Nidhi scheme to be launched in January,

some in the audience raised the hijab issue. To this, Siddaramaiah said, "There is no ban on wearing hijab in educational institutions, and I have already directed the officials to withdraw it."

"Our government's welfare schemes are for all sections of society. We don't discriminate against any particular community. It should be left to an individual to wear what he/she wants and eat what he/she likes. Nobody should impose any restrictions on such matters," he said.

This drew a big applause from the audience and some raised pro-Siddaramaiah slogans. "Prime Minister Narendra Modi's sabka saath sabka vikas" slogan is bogus. The BJP is dividing society,"

he charged.

Siddaramaiah said that his government has introduced the guarantee schemes for poor people from all religions and castes. "Are those supporting BJP not availing 10kg rice, are they not using free bus facility, free power and benefits of Gruha Lakshmi scheme?" he said.

Stating that a good law and order system will contribute to the State's economic growth, the CM directed the Intelligence Department to go after those who create trouble and disturb peace in society. He asked the police personnel to be people-friendly.

Home Minister Dr G Parameshwara and Mysuru district in-charge minister HC Mahadevappa were present.



Chief Minister Siddaramaiah initiates work for a new building of the Mysuru District Journalists' Association in Mysuru on Friday | UDAYSHANKAR S

EXPRESS READ Stray dog bites 25 people in Koppal village

Hubballi: A dog suspected to be suffering from rabies bit 25 persons in Alavandi village of Koppal district on Friday. The incident was reported near the primary health centre of the village. Eight people are under treatment at the district hospital | P5

After IMF worries, govt says debt under control

New Delhi: After the IMF raised concerns over the long-term sustainability of India's debts, the Finance Ministry said that the government debt is under control and the Centre is on track to reduce fiscal deficit target below 4.5% of GDP by FY26

35 lost lives in floods in southern TN districts

Chennai: Tamil Nadu Chief Secretary Shiv Das Meena has said 35 persons lost their lives in the floods triggered by torrential rains across four southern districts of the state. He said 49,707 people, with the aid of 323 boats, were rescued | P5

CM draws flak after his video in pvt jet goes viral

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

THE BJP has strongly criticised Chief Minister Siddaramaiah for taking a private chartered flight back home after holding discussions with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah in Delhi on the drought situation in the State.

The main Opposition party sought to know the need for the CM to take the chartered flight when the State is reeling under severe drought.

Interestingly, Housing Minister BZ Zameer Ahmed, who accompanied Siddaramaiah to Delhi, deleted the video of the flight he had posted on 'X' as soon as BJP leaders and netizens started questioning their act of "flaunting rich fortune and luxury lifestyles" when the State is facing drought. When reporters in Mysuru sought Siddaramaiah's reaction to BJP allegation, he asked them to question the saf-

ron party about which flight PM Modi takes. "How does Modi travel? You tell me first. Please ask this question to the BJP people, which plane does Narendra Modi take? He travels alone. Why does he travel alone? BJP leaders will keep saying silly things," the CM said.

Earlier, BJP state president BY Vijayendra posted the video on 'X' and said, "If bigotry had a face, @INC Karnataka govt would be the Best of it! At a time, when whole of Karnataka is reeling under drought & no rain & hardly any development works taking off, all that @CMofKarnataka & his ministers could think of flaunting their Rich Fortunes & Luxury Lifestyles over the poor damsels of the State. By the way, they were traveling in this luxurious aircraft to seek funds for drought relief works! What a crude mockery of our distress! Splurging the Taxpayers money comes so easy for @INC India ministers!" P4



KHELO INDIA AGAIN

Union Sports Minister Anurag Thakur (3rd Right) unveils the mascot for the upcoming Khelo India Youth Games in Tamil Nadu, in Chennai on Friday. TN Sports Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin (3rd Left) and chess great Viswanathan Anand (2nd Right), Olympian fencer Bhavani Devi (Right) are seen | ASHWIN PRASATH | P19

From pocket to e-calendar, this century-old press has it all

ASHWINI M SRIPAD @ Bengaluru

IN 1920, the diwan of Mysuru Sir M Visvesvaraya, who visited the Sindh province (now in Pakistan), was overwhelmed after seeing the calendars with public holidays printed there by Britishers.

The next year, Sir Visvesvaraya started printing such calendars in Kannada at The Bangalore Press founded by him in 1916 in the erstwhile Mysuru province. It is not just one of the oldest printing presses, but also one of the oldest companies in

India, which has completed 100 years of its existence.

On an average, the publisher prints 20 lakh calendars every year. They include wall mounted, desktop and pocket calendars. The press also prints the popular *Mallige Panchanga*. It has launched e-calendars with over six lakh downloads across the globe.

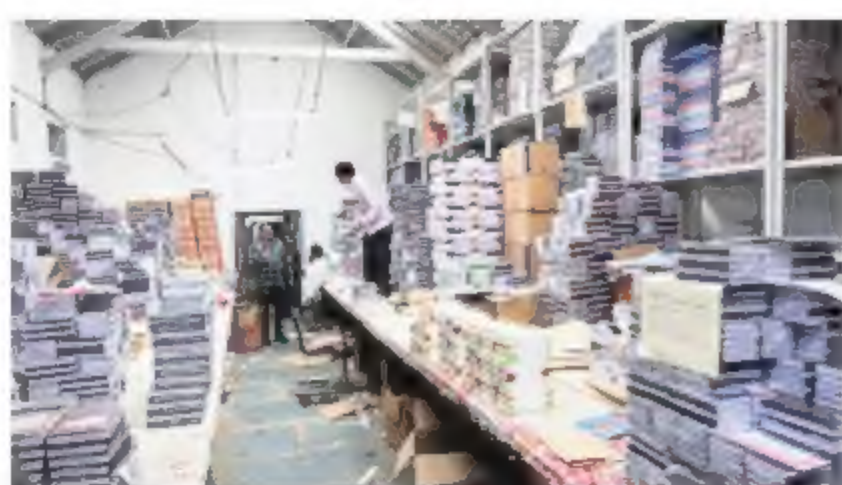
The management of this iconic press has taken up a modernisation plan. Revealing this to *TNIE*, one of its directors, Vishnu AH, said they have started customising e-calendars

for corporate and banking sectors, educational institutions and others. "We are using a software developed by a Finland agency where companies or banks can provide details to their customers through our e-calendar. For instance, if a bank wants to inform its customers that the home loan interest will change from a particular date, it can change itself or we can do the job for it," he said. This applies to schools and colleges also. If schools and colleges want to send messages to parents or children,

they can do it through the e-calendar, he said.

Vishnu said they have plans to develop an app to provide information related to auspicious days, festivals, melas, rathotsavas and other religious events. "Through the app one can get minute details of the particular day, be it village mela or a big festival. In the calendar, we have limited space to provide all information," he said.

Ananth HR from the press said with the printed QR code on the calendar, one can get information on cell phones.



On an average, The Bangalore Press prints 20 lakh calendars annually | MANAJAGANIEL